

**Reflection on the Gospel-33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time C
(Luke 21:5-19)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Fifty years ago there was no Sydney Opera House. A hundred years ago there was no Harbour Bridge. It is hard to imagine a time when they did not exist or a time when they will cease to be, such is the status these monuments have acquired over a very short span of history. They are a source of wonder for tourists and locals alike. They have their counterparts elsewhere in our contemporary world. Twenty years ago, New York's World Trade Centre was another such icon, seemingly indestructible and holding the pride of an economically and politically dominant nation, even if less aesthetically engaging than Sydney's monuments.

In first century Palestine, the newly refurbished Jerusalem Temple was both aesthetically stunning and symbolically charged. It functioned primarily as the centre of religious worship. It was also an important locus of financial and political power. Its significance can hardly be exaggerated and its destruction at the hands of the Romans in 70CE was a devastating blow for the Jewish people. Luke is writing some twenty years after this event. He wants to tell his communities that the destruction of the Temple did not signal the end of the world, though that is how it might have seemed at the time. There is life to be lived and there are struggles to be endured before God's final advent. Luke wants to offer hope and encouragement in the face of conflict and persecution and family division. He wants to offer his readers a caution not to listen to everyone who claims to know the time, the *kairos*, of God's visitation.

Like Jesus, disciples can expect to be "handed over" and brought before political authorities. They are to find in this an opportunity to give witness or "to testify". In his second volume, Luke has Jesus commissioning the disciples to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They don't have to worry about what to say in their own defence: "I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict." Endurance or patience is the way to life. The Greek term used here evokes the parable of the sower: "as for that [the seed] in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance" (Luke 8:15). In our own times, when the life of our planetary home is at stake, when the political systems we have trusted are so often manipulated by the greed of the few and when families are torn apart, we are called to witness to a gospel way of life, to hold the word of God fast in honest and good hearts and to trust that we are not alone in the everyday struggles of life.

Luke 21:5-19 When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place. And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them. "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be

dreadful portents and great signs from heaven." But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your life.